

June 15, 2006

The Honorable Larry Phillips  
Chair, King County Council  
Room 1200  
C O U R T H O U S E

Dear Councilmember Phillips:

On April 18, 2006 I proposed *Transit Now* and asked the people of King County whether they wanted increased transit service throughout the region. The answer was a resounding “Yes!” Therefore, I am pleased to transmit for the County Council’s consideration an ordinance authorizing a public vote on *Transit Now* on November 7, 2006. The ballot measure would authorize King County to raise our sales and use tax by 0.1 percent to make the needed enhancements to Metro Transit’s capital and maintenance programs and operations that will allow us to expand Metro’s award winning bus service throughout King County. The *Transit Now* measure will allow Metro to meet our future transit needs by increasing bus service at a rate that can better support our growing population and employment.

Citizens consistently tell us they need more transit choices and more frequent all-day service to more places. Equally important, they want improvements that can be delivered relatively quickly and can provide added travel options while major regional projects such as the Alaskan Way Viaduct are under construction. They understand the role transit will play in keeping the region moving while traffic is disrupted. *Transit Now* responds to all of these needs while also allowing us to reduce damaging greenhouse gas emissions by getting over 50,000 more trips daily onto buses and out of cars.

*Transit Now* is a new four-point initiative that will increase King County Metro Transit service to provide more than 50,000 new rides a day within ten years.

The initiative provides more frequent and convenient service to existing riders and will get additional drivers off the road and into buses each weekday to keep regional congestion in check. The initiative provides new travel options and traffic relief to thousands of commuters who will be affected by construction of highways and other transportation projects.

*Transit Now*, together with existing resources, will allow Metro to keep pace with employment and population growth, and will result in an overall increase of bus service by more than 20 percent systemwide – or as much as 640,000 new hours of bus service over the next ten years.

The environment will also win because more vehicles will be taken off the road – and that means less air pollution. Also, the cleanest fuels available will power Metro’s 21st Century fleet, including hybrid diesel-electric, electric, and biodiesel buses.

The initiative will be funded by a one-tenth of one percent sales tax measure to be approved by voters in King County. The sales tax increase amounts to an estimated 30 million dollars in

2007 and grows to an estimated 75 million dollars by 2016. The 50 to 75 million dollars in annual revenues will fund immediate transportation improvements to get the region moving through more transit service and help reduce congestion.

Best of all, if approved by the voters, all of these improvements will cost the average household in King County only 25 dollars more a year in sales tax – less than the cost of a tank of gas.

The improvements funded by *Transit Now* are described in Exhibit A. They include both operating expenses and capital facilities to support the following programs:

- RapidRide Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service, providing frequent all day service and faster travel times on five key travel corridors;
- Continued development of a multi-centered network of core bus routes providing frequent (target frequency of 15 minute) all-day, two-way, seven-days-a-week service between King County's most densely developed activity centers;
- Increased service to growing residential areas within the Urban Growth Area by adding peak service in areas not currently served and offering midday service in some areas that currently have peak service only;
- Increased service to rapidly expanding employment centers in locations where transit service investments will generate the most riders through the development of financial partnerships with local jurisdictions and business; and
- Improved Access paratransit and vanpool services to areas not easily served by traditional transit routes and investments for increased safety, access and convenience for pedestrians and cyclists at Park and Rides and Transit Centers.

**Metro: The foundation of King County's public transportation system**

Metro is the region's largest transit service provider, carrying almost 100 million riders per year – or more than 335,000 riders every weekday. It's estimated this service is responsible for removing thousands of cars each day from already clogged highways and roads. Metro's extensive service network carries passengers to work, school, shopping, medical appointments, and meets the basic mobility needs of thousands of King County residents.

Metro provides many other services you may hear less about – including vanpools and ridematching services, a seasonal water taxi, special service to major events like ballgames and festivals, and Access van service for people with disabilities. Even when future rapid transit systems are completed, Metro buses, vanpools, Access vans, and other services will still serve as the backbone of the region's transit service by carrying most of the transit trips in the county. Most riders feel they're getting their money's worth – more than 90 percent of Metro customers routinely surveyed report they are satisfied with Metro services. And, there is a constant demand for more service throughout all areas of King County.

**The benefits of transit service for passengers and non-passengers**

- **Mobility:** Not everyone can drive, but everyone needs to get around. Regular transit and Access paratransit services provide mobility for many King County residents.
- **Congestion relief:** Transit provides an alternative for those who hate to sit in traffic. But even those who drive alone benefit from transit, since every rider is one less person fighting for limited roadway space.
- **Environmental protection:** When people ride buses, they are responsible for fewer pollution-causing emissions. Metro operates one of the cleanest large bus fleets in the nation.
- **Supporting healthier development patterns:** Transit promotes pedestrian-oriented development and makes it easier for people to incorporate walking and bicycling into their travel.

**Thriving economy, quality of life means transit service can't keep pace in King County.**

In recent years, growth in population and employment throughout King County has outpaced Metro's ability to provide service with current revenue. Now, the county is poised to create more than 250,000 new jobs and add more than 150,000 additional residents over the next decade. More transit will be needed just to maintain the current percentage of residents riding Metro. To achieve the region's land use, employment, and environmental goals, Metro needs to carry a growing proportion of trips to support the county's mobility, economy, and quality of life.

Ridership is increasing, with more bus riders standing in the aisles during rush hours. Yet, with current revenues Metro can only grow slowly at a time when service demand is increasing. Without *Transit Now*, Metro will grow by only a fraction of the rate of employment growth in King County in the coming years.

Even with proposals taking shape for the investment of billions of dollars in road improvements, the need to travel will outpace our ability to add vehicle capacity in congested corridors. With *Transit Now*, new bus service can be deployed more quickly than we can construct regional roadway projects and rail lines. With additional revenue, Metro can launch new service within months to provide immediate benefits throughout the county.

In 1999, following passage of Initiative 695, the state eliminated a dedicated source of funding for transit. The state authorized 0.3 percent sales tax to replace this funding. King County voters responded by raising King County's transit sales tax 0.2 percent, which prevented drastic cuts in transit service but did not allow the system to grow very much. This new proposal adds the final 0.1 percent transit sales tax authorized by the state and will allow Metro to keep pace with growth that is happening now.

**How the *Transit Now* Initiative will help: Four key areas of new transit service**

More than 500,000 people countywide will have improved service within walking distance on more than 35 major routes. Highlights within each of the geographic areas include:

**RapidRide** – Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is a term used to describe transit services and facility improvements that achieve faster operation than traditional buses.

Recently, Metro and the cities of Shoreline and Seattle moved the Aurora Avenue North/State Route 99 corridor closer to RapidRide service levels by increasing the frequency of service throughout the day, and by moving buses to a dedicated transit lane in some sections of Aurora. Over the past five years, ridership has increased on Aurora Avenue North by almost 2,000 rides per day, more than 600,000 annually.

With the *Transit Now* Initiative, Metro will develop and implement RapidRide service on five corridors, including:

- Complete the Aurora Avenue North improvements between Shoreline to downtown Seattle;
- Ballard to downtown Seattle along 15th Avenue Northwest and Elliott Avenue West;
- West Seattle to downtown Seattle with a possible extension to the University District using the downtown transit tunnel and Interstate 5;
- Bellevue to Redmond on Northeast 8th Street and 156th Avenue Northeast via Crossroads and Overlake;
- SeaTac to Federal Way on Pacific Highway South (State Route 99); and
- Install new buses and upgraded passenger waiting areas; plus add technology to synchronize traffic signals and operate real-time bus arrival signs.

**More service** – Metro is proposing more all-day, two-way core bus service in 35 major Metro routes where ridership is heaviest. These high-ridership routes connect residential, business, and recreational centers throughout the county and are a more reliable travel alternative because they are available throughout the day rather than only during peak travel periods. Even commuter ridership improves when passengers can count on service being available at all times of day.

These route improvements will bring more frequent and more reliable service to all urban areas of King County. Types of improvements that will be made to core routes include: improved frequency during peak and midday periods; expanded night and weekend service; more trips to provide more seats on routes that are overcrowded; and revised routes to provide better coverage to under-served areas.

**New service for growing areas** – Growth in the suburban areas of King County has been rapid for the past 20 years, and transit service has not kept up. Under this proposal, Metro will increase service to growing residential areas by adding peak service in areas not currently served, and offering midday service in some areas that currently have peak service only.

**Highlights of *Transit Now* improvements by geographic area**

### **Seattle/Shoreline**

- Much of the new investment proposed for the Seattle/Shoreline area is focused on RapidRide BRT corridors. There will be improvements on other major routes as well;
- Improve east/west connections through Capital Hill, South Lake Union and Uptown/lower Queen Anne;
- Increase frequency between Northgate, the University District and Downtown Seattle in advance of Link Light Rail completion;
- Add new trips to existing routes with heavy ridership to address overcrowding; and,
- Revise some routes to better connect with Link light rail at the McClellan, Othello, and Henderson stations.

### **East King County**

- Create a RapidRide BTR corridor connecting Bellevue and Redmond;
- Develop a network of all-day routes with frequent service connecting most business and residential centers within the central Eastside;
- Provide new direct connections to major job centers on the Eastside; and
- Improve core route connections for Kenmore, Kirkland, Issaquah, Crossroads, Overlake, Kirkland, Redmond, Bellevue, Bellevue Community College, Eastgate, and Factoria.

### **South King County**

- Improve east-west core connections to operate more frequently and/or over longer hours of operation;
- Update local routes to connect with light rail and commuter rail;
- Upgrade local service between Kent Station and Covington and extend to Maple Valley; and
- Improve access to employment sites on the airport area.

**Service partnerships** – The proposal includes resources for developing partnerships to serve rapidly expanding employment centers in locations where transit service investments will generate the most riders. These new partnerships could leverage millions of dollars in additional transit service and could be modeled after the highly successful programs Metro has operated with partners such as the University of Washington and Microsoft. In both cases, the partners have shared a portion of the cost of new transit service and supported the investment with programs such as pass subsidies and parking management.

**Additional improvements** – The *Transit Now* Initiative also includes ideas to: Expand Access paratransit service to areas where it is currently not provided, enabling seniors and riders with disabilities to use bus service. Make ridesharing improvements to double participation in Vanpool and VanShare programs. Improved ridematching tools will make it easier for county residents to find carpool or vanpool riders. Make capital investments in improved passenger amenities at bus stops, better passenger information and electronic bus arrival times, and more safe and convenient access to Park and Rides and Transit centers for pedestrians and cyclists.

**Preliminary citizen feedback to *Transit Now***

Since I proposed the *Transit Now* program in April, the Department of Transportation (DOT) has conducted an extraordinary outreach effort to inform the public and solicit feedback. The positive response has been overwhelming. The DOT has heard from an estimated five thousand residents and stakeholders. In addition to soliciting comments online, DOT staff connected with more than 80 stakeholder groups including employers, community organizations, local government agencies and media. DOT staff also mailed information and feedback forms to over 20,000 people on the transit mailing list. The Public Involvement Report shows the findings of that outreach effort. Over 3,700 community members completed the feedback form, which is an astonishing 18 percent return rate.

A separate random survey of 633 households commissioned by Metro a few weeks ago additionally revealed 77 percent of residents surveyed supporting a one-tenth of one percent sales tax increase, or one penny on a ten dollar purchase, to pay for *Transit Now* improvements. Feedback also showed that support for the major service improvements included in the *Transit Now* proposal ranged anywhere from 79 to 90 percent in favor of the investments. These comments closely track the feedback collected in previous Metro surveys and demonstrates that *Transit Now* provides the service improvements residents are asking for. In fact, the overall community response to *Transit Now* has been unprecedented compared to the level of feedback received on past Metro initiatives.

I urge you to put *Transit Now* on the November ballot. Give the voters of King County the opportunity to put more Metro Transit services in more places, more often, to serve the growing needs of all of our communities.

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If you have any questions regarding this proposal, please contact Harold Taniguchi, Director, Department of Transportation, at 206-684-1441, or Kevin Desmond, General Manager, Metro Transit Division, at 206-684-1619.

Sincerely,

Ron Sims

King County Executive

Enclosures

cc: King County Councilmembers

ATTN: Shelley Sutton, Policy Staff Director

Paul Carlson, Lead Staff, Transportation Committee

Anne Noris, Clerk of the Council

Bob Cowan, Director, Office of Management and Budget

Ryan Bayne, Director, Intergovernmental Relations

Harold S. Taniguchi, Director, Department of Transportation (DOT)

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Jim Jacobson, Deputy General Manager, Metro Transit Division, DOT

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